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ABSTRACT

This issue of WIN (Welfare Information Network) Issue Notes raises some major issues that agencies may want to address as they consider expanding collaborative efforts. It describes collaborative efforts and identifies resources that could prove useful in designing successful collaborations. Section 1 offers background. Section 2 answers these policy questions: why collaboration is beneficial; how agencies identify partners; what the mechanisms for assigning responsibility are; how participating agencies define objectives; what critical components of successful collaboration are; what funding strategies are; and what the mechanisms for sharing information across agencies are. Section 3 summarizes research that suggests these actions that can lead to successful collaborative efforts and interagency projects: developing a clear explanation of why certain issues are best addressed by multiple groups; ensuring support from the highest levels of the organization; streamlining service delivery and providing a single point of contact; and encouraging regular communication among partners. Section 4 describes successful innovative practices and contact information: EMPOWER Kentucky; GENESIS; Linkage Team; Local Investment Commission (LINC); Neighborhood Networks; New Hampshire Employment and Training Program; Rural Partners; and Smart Start. Nine resource contacts and 19 publications are listed. (YLB)

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Interagency Collaboration and Welfare Reform

Tara Sussman

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WELFARE INFORMATION NETWORK

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Interagency Collaboration and Welfare Reform

by Tara Sussman

Background

Groups and individuals began collaborating on behalf of children and families long before the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. However, this legislation affords states greater flexibility in structuring new mechanisms to allow their public assistance programs to better meet the needs of recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

As states and communities gain more experience in implementing welfare-to-work programs, it has become increasingly clear that they must provide services to a significant number of adults with multiple barriers to employment. There is also growing evidence of the need for services to support adults once they have entered the workforce. The services required to meet the needs of these adults and their dependents often transcend the typical experience and expertise of TANF agency staff. Consequently, many TANF agencies are exploring ways to work more effectively with other public and private agencies and service providers.

During the past three years, states have developed interagency partnerships aimed at improving services for TANF recipients and those making the transition from welfare to work. In some cases, the TANF agency contracts with other agencies or service providers for specific activities. In other cases, the state assigns certain tasks or support responsibilities for all or part of its TANF population to an agency with more experience in treating barriers such as substance abuse or mental illness, or with particular expertise in job placement or workforce development. However, in many states and localities, government and community-based service providers are exploring more flexible methods for working together. The result is greater interest in employing various forms of collaboration and in using TANF and maintenance-of-effort (MOE) funds to support collaborative activities.

The importance of interagency collaboration is acknowledged in recent legislation. According to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), employment, training, literacy, and vocational rehabilitation programs receiving funds from the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) of the U.S. Department of Labor are now required to coordinate their service delivery systems. Moreover, WIA requires the use of one-stop centers for ETA-funded employment programs. One-stop centers provide employment and training services and information in central locations.

This *Issue Note* raises some of the major issues that agencies may want to address as they

consider expanding collaborative efforts. It also describes collaborative efforts and identifies resources that could prove useful in designing successful collaborations.

Policy Questions

Why is collaboration beneficial? The problems facing current welfare recipients and those leaving public assistance are often multifaceted. Resolving these problems often requires specialized expertise. In some cases, TANF staff may have this expertise; in other cases, the TANF agency may need to look to other state agencies to furnish expertise in areas its staff are less equipped to address. Collaborations enable agencies to work together to craft more comprehensive strategies to help welfare recipients achieve long-term self-sufficiency. Broad-based collaborations can also help welfare recipients navigate the maze of governmental agencies by supplying more integrated services, cutting down on paperwork, and reducing delays in service provision. In addition, collaborative efforts between TANF agencies and others such as workforce boards, child care commissions, transportation providers, and mental health workers can increase efficiency, facilitate resource exchange, and reduce duplication of services.

How do agencies identify partners? Although partners in a collaborative effort may have diverse responsibilities and different organizational goals, most collaborations will be built around mutual goals or a common clientele. For example, TANF and workforce agencies would seem to be natural collaborators because they both seek to place unemployed workers in jobs and both serve a significant number of entry-level or relatively low-skilled workers. In addition, the type of expertise needed to address a particular problem or issue may drive the selection of collaborators. Collaborations between TANF agencies and mental health agencies are examples of such expertise-driven collaborations. A partnership is often formed when different organizations realize that they share common concerns and that working together will enable them to strengthen their message, increase the size of the population they can reach, reduce overlap in work efforts, and reduce costs. Partnerships involving several programs—for example, TANF, workforce development, and mental health—or a variety of organizations—for example, state and local agencies, for-profit and nonprofit service providers, and community-based and faith-based groups—can infuse collaborative efforts with a new perspective or approach, expand the available expertise, and improve community or political support.

What are the mechanisms for assigning responsibility? Collaboration works best when the partners have a clear understanding of their respective responsibilities. States and localities have used several mechanisms to define those responsibilities and ensure accountability among the partners. In some cases, the details of the collaboration are reflected in a formal contract. In other cases, the responsibilities are spelled out in interagency memoranda of agreement. In still other cases, the assignment of responsibilities is a more dynamic process that is driven by a joint strategic planning process or joint management team.

How do participating agencies define objectives? Agreement on service levels or inputs is an important part of collaborative agreements. Yet a focus on jointly agreed upon outcomes and a method of measuring progress toward those outcomes is often more important to the design of a successful collaboration. Outcomes provide a strong signal to all of the partners and enable them to evaluate success and identify issues and problems objectively. In some cases, the outcomes for a collaboration may be specified in federal or state legislation or regulation. For example, job placement and retention are outcomes specified in the federal TANF legislation. In most cases, these legislatively or regulatorily defined objectives will be

compatible with those of the collaboration, but sometimes the objectives selected for a collaborative effort will require measuring different outcomes for different partners. Although these statutory and regulatory measures are important, the outcomes for most collaborations will typically be less far reaching and more specifically related to the purposes of the collaboration and the level of resources provided. Additional resources on developing outcomes and performance measures can be found at http://www.welfareinfo.org/performance.htm and http://www.financeproject.org/resultsbased.htm.

What are critical components of successful collaboration? Clear assignment of responsibility and jointly agreed upon outcomes are two components critical to success. Other important factors include mutual trust, a willingness to share ideas and technical supports to enable the partners to communicate easily and effectively. Collaborations are also enhanced if they include flexibility in their design and enable the partners to adjust to changing circumstances. Finally, collaborations require the ongoing support of agency and program management. Although collaborations can develop on an ad hoc basis without management support, they are often short-lived unless such support can be developed. Collaborations work best when all of the partners are willing to make compromises to achieve group goals and when they are willing to consider methods and strategies that differ from those followed in their home organization. A willingness to share ideas, time, and other resources also is crucial to the success of the collaborative effort.

What are funding strategies? In most cases, funding for collaborations comes from existing sources. For example, TANF funds can be used to purchase services through contracts or, in some cases, they can be transferred directly to another agency. In addition, collaborations are often funded through the pooling of resources across agency or program lines. For example, TANF and child care funds can be pooled to better serve working parents, and TANF and transportation funds can be pooled to transport recipients from where they live to where job opportunities exist. Foundation funds have been used to fund the administrative infrastructure needed to maintain a collaborative effort, and donations or fees for service have supported some collaborative activities.

See WIN's Resources for Decision-Makers, "Financing Broad-Based Community Collaboratives," at http://www.welfareinfo.org/communitycollabs.htm for other financing strategies.

What are the mechanisms for sharing information across agencies? Collaboration requires sharing information at several levels. Collaborating agencies may need to share financial and demographic data about clients to determine financial eligibility and the types of service needed. Information on referrals and service delivery is needed to manage cases effectively and ensure that clients do not fall through the cracks. Financial and program data are needed to determine payments, monitor performance, and meet federal and state reporting requirements.

Increasingly, states are looking to develop administrative data systems that facilitate information sharing across agency lines. However, federal and state confidentiality requirements can be barriers to sharing information. There are several ways to overcome these barriers and protect client privacy, but it is important that the barriers be identified early so eligibility determination procedures and case management and personal responsibility agreements are designed to do so. For more information, see the Oregon Department of Human Resources' Yellow Pages: Handbook for Confidentiality in Social

Service Collaborations or call the department at 503/945-6104. Also see the guide of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) on facilitating communication and information exchange between state welfare and substance abuse prevention and treatment agencies while protecting client privacy, Welfare Reform and Substance Abuse Treatment Confidentiality: General Guidance for Reconciling Need to Know and Privacy. Call SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 800/729-6686.

Although administrative data systems and automated case management systems are important communication tools, other tools can be used to facilitate better communication among collaborators in the absence of, or as a supplement to, those systems. The Internet, audio and video conferencing, and electronic mail make it easier for collaborators to share information on a timely basis. Communication can also be improved through nontechnical means, such as collocation, multi-agency teaming, and regular case consultations.

Research Findings and Tools

Research suggests that several actions can lead to successful collaborative efforts and interagency projects. They include:

- developing a clear explanation for why certain issues are best addressed by multiple groups;
- ensuring support from the highest levels of the organization;
- defining organizational goals while making sure to put the client's needs above all;
- streamlining service delivery to clients and providing a single point of contact; and
- encouraging regular communication among partners.

For additional research on community-based collaboratives, refer to "Community-Based Collaboration, Community Wellness Multiplied," from the Chandler Center for Community Learning, at http://crs.uvm.edu/nnco/collab/wellness.html or call 541/388-8361. This article details reasons for organizing a collaborative effort, what collaboratives can offer a community, and challenges for collaboration.

For more information on collaborative strategies and issues crucial to efforts focused on children and families, see "Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Profamily System of Education and Human Services," from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, at http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/families/TWC/.

Evaluations of current collaborative projects useful in determining the components of interagency projects that merit replication and that should be improved upon are available in "The 1997–1998 Cleveland Community Building Initiative Baseline Report on Collaborative Relationships," from the Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change, 216/368-6946. Additional information can be found in "Mixed Results: Lessons Learned

from a Case Study of Interagency Collaboration," Special Report No.10, The Policy Exchange Institute for Educational Leadership. Call 202/822-8405 or visit http://www.iel.org.

Innovative Practices

There are several steps to successful collaboration discussed in the research as well as by program managers participating in cross-agency projects. Listed below are examples from state and local programs demonstrating how they strive to meet their objectives through collaborative efforts. This is not a "best practices" list; it is meant to acquaint the reader with the multitude of possibilities for interagency collaboration.

EMPOWER Kentucky was launched in 1996 by Governor Paul E. Patton to enable state employees to improve service delivery and identify cost savings in state programs. Driven by state employees, it fundamentally changed state business processes. EMPOWER Kentucky involves nine initiatives, including Simplified Administrative Services, Strategic Information Technology Plans, and Internet Access in Public Libraries. A process owner is assigned to support each initiative and coordinate cross-agency teams to achieve the initiative's goals. One of the initiatives, Simplified Access to Commonwealth Services, is a collaborative effort involving the Cabinets for Families and Children, Health Services, and Workforce Development as well as community partners across Kentucky. The goal of this initiative is to improve health, employment, and human services delivery and benefits. It also strives to increase the amount of information available to Kentucky residents. For more information, visit http://empower.state.ky.us or call Nancy Ward at 502/564-2611.

GENESIS, a program in Boulder County, Colorado, provides services to teen parents and their families. The program aims to reach 95 percent teens in the county. These young women are referred to the program by local social service agencies, doctors, hospitals, schools, clinics, and other GENESIS clients. Once they are referred to GENESIS, they are in constant contact with program workers. Services are tailored to meet the needs of the parent and child and are available until the child is three years old. They include transportation to medical appointments, parenting education, assistance with entry or reentry into high school or a General Educational Development (GED) program, and referral to job training. GENESIS partners include the Boulder County Departments of Health, Social Services, and Community Services; the St. Vrain Valley and Boulder Valley school districts; the cities of Boulder and Longmont; and the private nonprofit Mental Health Center of Boulder County. GENESIS was launched in 1989 with funds confiscated from drug dealers. For more information, call Frank Campanella-Green at 303/441-1138.

Linkage Team has nine staff members who are collocated in WorkFirst (TANF) offices across King County, Washington, which includes Seattle. Staff conduct outreach and recruit potentially eligible welfare-to-work clients. The Linkage Team includes caseworkers from the Department of Social and Health Services, the Employment Security Department, the Refugee Pathway, and the Private Industry Council. The cross-agency staff who comprise Linkage Team seek to facilitate communication between WorkFirst and welfare-to-work contractors on client needs. The Linkage Team helps WorkFirst offices see the direct results of clients who have enrolled in the welfare-to-work program and ensures that the welfare-to-work contractors are meeting WorkFirst program objectives. For more information, contact Amy Robins at 206/448-0484 or arobins@skcpic.org.

Local INvestment Commission (LINC) is a community-based collaborative led by a

committee of volunteers that includes residents, business leaders, neighborhood leaders, labor leaders, and welfare recipients. LINC aims to improve the lives of children and families in Kansas City and Jackson County, Missouri. It seeks to increase job opportunities for those on welfare, encourage new businesses, improve the delivery of human services, and better the lives of families and children. It also concentrates on school-linked services and aging, health care, and housing issues. A professional cabinet meets with LINC's 36-member commission and more than 700 volunteers to offer them support and advice on developing a comprehensive, community-based approach to welfare reform and creating a more inclusive employment system.

LINC is also responsible for administering the **Missouri Caring Communities** effort. The program was initiated by seven state departments—Social Services, Mental Health, Health, Labor, Education, Corrections, and Economic Development. Missouri Caring Communities is part of a reform effort that aims to develop comprehensive, flexible, and accessible neighborhood services for children and families through community participation, professional development, and change management. Caring Communities' core results and benchmarks of success are parents working, children safe in their families, and families safe in their communities; healthy children and families; young children ready to enter school; children and youth succeeding in school; and youth ready to enter the workforce and become productive citizens. LINC provides guidance, training, and assistance to the 56 schools tied to the Caring Communities project. It also ensures that all sites demonstrate broad support and interest on the part of residents, parents, and school and agency staff. In addition, LINC requires that a council of parents, local residents, school personnel, business and civic leaders, youth, and agency representatives lead Caring Communities efforts at each site.

For more information on LINC, visit http://www.kclinc.org or contact Brent Schondelmeyer at 816/889-5050 or bschonde@kclinc.org. For more information on Missouri Caring Communities, visit the Missouri Family Investment Trust at http://www.mofit.org or call 314/531-5505.

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based initiative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that supports the development of resource and computer learning centers in privately owned HUD-assisted and/or HUD-insured properties. More than 600 centers operate across the nation. Individual Neighborhood Network centers offer resources and assistance, including computer training, Internet access, job-readiness support, GED certification, health care, social services, adult education classes, and youth services. The centers rely on national and local organizations as partners to provide these services.

On a national level, Neighborhood Networks develops partnerships to be implemented throughout the nation at the local Neighborhood Network centers. For example, the HUD National Neighborhood Networks office collaborated with the Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The goal of this national partnership is to develop partnerships at the local level that will bring health professionals and resources from BPHC-supported community health centers to Neighborhood Networks centers to provide medical services and/or health education classes. Neighborhood Networks offers its national partners access to their target population—low-income families—as well as access to technology and space for their activities. Neighborhood Networks centers also partner with local businesses, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, faith-based organizations, civic organizations, foundations, hospitals, community clinics, and government agencies. For more information,

contact the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at 1-888/312-2743 or visit http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

New Hampshire Employment and Training Program (NHEP) is an interagency collaboration between the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the New Hampshire Employment Security Organization (NHES), and the Southern New Hampshire Services Community Action Program. (The New Hampshire Services Community Action Program links NHEP to community action programs across the state.) The interagency teams work together to deliver the employment support services under the TANF work requirement. The NHEP interagency teams are located at the local NHES offices and consist of at least one DHHS social worker, a NHES employment counselor, and a Community Action case manager. The team assesses individuals and helps them prepare for employment and find work. All members of the team are cross-trained so they can provide clients with the full range of information and services available and administer all program requirements. Each client is assigned to one team member, and client files are kept in one central location so team members can easily access the information. Collocating staff at the one-stop service center at NHES ensures that individuals have access to the assistance available from all three agencies and need not travel to multiple locations to apply for services and learn about eligibility. Also, the Community Action Agencies are the service providers for the Welfare to Work program providing an additional link to coordination. Another unique aspect of NHEP is the use of interagency profile and oversight teams to manage the collaboration. Both teams include representatives from the three participating agencies. The profile team supplies guidance and technical assistance on the local level. It also provides a link between the NHEP teams and the oversight team, which consists of senior managers from the three NHEP agencies. The oversight team provides general coordination and direction. For more information, contact Mary Ann Broshek (TANF administrator and DHHS representative) at 603/271-4442.

Rural Partners is an Illinois public-private partnership for rural community development. It is an inclusive, highly diverse state wide membership organization that includes individuals and representatives of the local, state, and federal governments and private for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Rural Partners is affliated with the National Rural Development Partnership and the Illinois Rural Development Council (visit http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/nrdp/index.html). The Illinois partnership seeks to increase networking, collaboration, and links to individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities in order to improve the economic vitality of rural Illinois. Currently, Rural Partners has 36 elected representatives and 250 individual and organizational members (visit http://www.ruralpartners.org/). For more information, contact Paul Galligos at 217/585-9242 or galligos@ruralpartners.org.

Smart Start was launched by North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt Jr. in 1993. It is now administered by local collaborations in the state's100 counties. Smart Start nonprofit boards identify the needs of children and families in their communities. The initiative seeks to ensure that children are receiving preventive health care services and quality, affordable child care. It also addresses parents' needs for transportation to child care and health care services. Smart Start changed the service delivery system of family services so the agencies providing these services work together rather than separately. The authorizing legislation requires that certain individuals serve on local Smart Start councils, including the superintendent of schools and the heads of various government departments and community organizations. Also serving on these boards are community members who have insight into the relevant issues, such as parents, educators, child care providers, representatives of

nonprofit organizations and faith communities, and businesspeople.

The North Carolina Partnership for Children provides oversight and technical assistance for the local partnerships. For more information, visit http://www.smartstart-nc.org or call Geelea Seaford at 919/821-7999. Smart Start is a part of the Starting Points Initiative that aims, among other goals, to draw greater public attention to the needs of families with young children. The Finance Project, in collaboration with the Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, contracts with Carnegie Corporation of New York to maintain primary responsibility for the day-to-day operations and offer technical assistance for Starting Points. Visit http://www.financeproject.org/sp.html for more information.

For more information...

RESOURCE CONTACTS

Alliance for Redesigning Government, 202/347-3190 or http://www.alliance.napawash.org/alliance/index.html.

California School-to-Work Interagency Transition Partnership, 916/443-8694 or http://www.sna.com/switp.

Chandler Center for Community Leadership, 541/388-8361.

Institute for Collaborative Leadership, 773/743-0448 or http://home.att.net/~randagroup/index.html.

Institute for Educational Leadership, 202/822-8405 or http://www.iel.org/.

National Network for Collaboration, http://crs.uvm.edu/nnco.

National Partnership for Reinventing Government, http://www.npr.gov/.

Office of Intergovernmental Solutions, http://policyworks.gov/org/main/mg/intergov/.

Together We Can Initiative, 202/822-8405 or http://www.togetherwecan.org/.

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Summaries of New State TANF Plans

The Administration for Children and Families, the American Public Human Services Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Governors' Association, and the Welfare Information Network are working together to prepare joint summaries of the key provisions of new State TANF plans and State TANF programs. These summaries will be available electronically on the Internet and in printed form later this Spring. "Stay Tuned" for further information on how to access these summaries.

For more information: welfinfo@welfareinfo.org or http://www.welfareinfo.org.

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